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ABSTRACT

These guidelines for conducting oral history projects are the result of the first efforts at school history of sixth-grade students at the Southside Elementary School, Columbus. While the guidelines stem from a project on a specific topic, they would be useful to students (even students beyond the sixth grade) who wish to do oral history work. Among the questions answered in these guidelines are: Where do I begin?; How do I prepare for an interview?; What do I take to the interview?; How do I conduct the interview?; What questions do I ask?; and What went wrong? An interview information sheet and a sample thank you and follow-up also are included. (DB)

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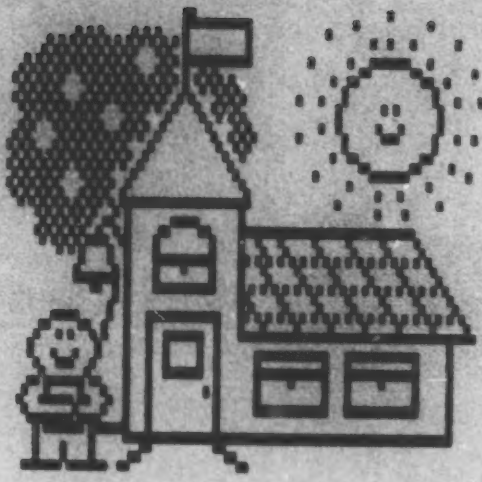

# OLD SCHOOLHOUSE GANG

SO 021 131

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# Old Schoolhouse Gang: Some Guidelines for School Oral History Projects

Indiana Historical Bureau
Indianapolis, 1990

# Foreword

This booklet is presented with the permission of its original publisher, Southside Elementary School, Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation, for distribution by the Indiana Historical Bureau. Copies are being provided free to all public libraries in the State of Indiana and to schools which contain chapters of the Indiana Junior Historical Society.

It is available for purchase in single and bulk copies; please inquire about pricing from the Bureau office, 140 North Senate Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2296, telephone, 317-232-2535.

*Yesterday's Schools* (1987) was the result of this first effort at school history in Bartholomew County by sixth graders at Southside Elementary School, Columbus. The publication includes historical information about thirty-seven one room schools – twenty-five in six townships of Bartholomew County, eight in other counties of Indiana, and four in other states. The publication lists forty-one persons interviewed. The project took approximately seven months to complete. The principal was Larry Harden. The supervising teachers were Mr. Ross Wallace, Mrs. Janice Montgomery, and Mr. Chuck Grimes.

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## PURPOSE

As students in the "Old Schoolhouse Gang" you will be striving to collect interviews and information from community members who attended early schools in Bartholomew County. This information will be written in such a way as to create a booklet called *Yesterday's Schools*. This booklet is an effort to preserve local history in Bartholomew County. As a member of this group you will become a published author in your own community.

Compiled by Janice Montgomery, Southside School,
Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation

## WHERE DO I BEGIN?

You are searching for people who attended one-room schools or other early schools in Bartholomew County. The years might span from the late 1800's to the 1950's. You might meet community members whose parents or grandparents attended such a school. Your role will be that of the interviewer. The person you ask questions will be the interviewee. Below are some suggestions for locating possible interviewees.

**Inquire Among:**

-Members of your own family
-Friends of your parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents
-Neighbors
-Church friends or ministers
-Senior Citizen groups
-Nursing home residents
-Retirement center residents
-Retired Teachers Association members
-People at neighborhood gatherings or reunions
-Members of various community organizations

*There will also be a starter list available at school.

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW?

Remember you will probably have only one opportunity to interview each person, so it is important to plan ahead. Your interview should be an enjoyable and rewarding experience for everyone involved. Your careful planning is the key to a successful interview.

1. Select someone to contact.
2. Plan for transportation to the interview before making contact with the interviewee/narrator. Be ready with suggested times that you have available.
3. Write out your phone presentation.
   -State your name, school, and sponsor's name
   -Describe the purpose of the project
   -Tell of the plans for the finished product
4. Phone the contact person with your paper, pencil, and calendar ready.
5. Before ending your phone conversation, restate the place, date, and time of the scheduled interview to avoid any confusion.

### Phone Etiquette

After gaining permission for use of the phone, use the following tips.

1. Identify yourself and the project.
2. Speak clearly.
3. Call at an appropriate time. (After 9:00 A.M. and before 7:30 P.M. on weekdays and Saturdays.)
4. Be courteous (even if you are not granted an interview!)
5. Restate and clarify meeting times.

## WHAT DO I TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW?

The actual interview is the basis of your future story. It is critical that you get the details correct to provide an accurate account of the narrator's history. You will need to be prepared to guide the person in conversation about the selected topic. While specific questions should be written, you should not be afraid to deviate into other areas that relate to the topic.

Remember to take:

1. Prepared questions, notepaper, and the "Interview Information Sheet."
2. Two pens or pencils.
3. Tape recorder, extension cord, and two cassette tapes.
4. Take a sharp mind that is interested in the project.

You will need to test the tape recorder before you arrive at the interview and retest when everything is ready to begin. The recorder should be within four feet of both the interviewee's chair and your position. Maintain good eye contact with the person you are questioning. Be sure to ask for clarification of words you cannot understand and spellings of unfamiliar terms and names. It is important to begin the tape by stating the name of the interviewee and the date of the interview for future reference. You may also state your name and the location of the meeting.

## HOW DO I CONDUCT THE INTERVIEW?

Your actions and conduct will leave a long lasting impression on the person sharing his/her experiences with you. To show how well you are prepared, follow these directions.

1. Arrive on time for your interview.
2. Introduce yourself and restate your purpose for the interview.
3. Set up your equipment and test it. (Avoid being near a noisy fan or appliance if possible.)
4. Ask questions that require feelings as well as facts.
5. Be patient and listen.
6. Ask for photos, letters, or other school memorabilia that could be reproduced for use in the book. (Log this on to your interview sheet. Leave your name and school phone number with the narrator.)
7. Thank the person whom you interviewed.

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET**

Date of Interview _____
Full Name of Interviewee _____
Maiden _____
Date of Birth _____
Place of Birth _____
School attended _____
Township _____
Years attended _____
Grades attended _____
Current Address _____
Phone _____

**Vocabulary List**

**Other Interviewees**

Can you think of other people I might contact for help with this project? (Obtain Full Name and Phone)

**Items Borrowed**

List each item borrowed. If there is a photograph, please write the names of those in the picture on a separate sheet of paper. Place all items in a box or envelope to assure their protection with the name of the person loaning them.

As soon as the items are duplicated, they will be returned.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

**WHAT QUESTIONS DO I ASK?**

The narrator or person you interview will probably have a great deal to tell you, but needs to be guided by good questions that relate to the information sought. Below you will find sample questions. Please adapt and add to them ones you feel would help accomplish the goal of researching early schools.

When and where were you born?
How old are you now?
How long has your family lived in Bartholomew County?
Where did you live as a child?
What school/schools did you attend in Bartholomew County?
In what township was each school located?
Is your school still standing?
For what is the school used today?
When was the school destroyed? How?
What activities do you remember about school life?
What were your favorite activities? Why?
What effect did school life have on your daily life as a child?
What customs were practiced for holidays at school?
How was the classroom decorated?
How many children attended your school?
Were there many family members in your school?
Did you pay a book fee? Was there any charge for attending school?
What books do you remember using?
What did you bring for your lunch?
How did the teachers respond toward the students?
How did the teachers teach so many children in different grades?
What did your family do for a living? Did that affect your school life? If so, how?
What were afterschool activities?

What subjects were taught? What did you like the most? Why?

How did you get to school?

What was the role/job of the trustee? Do you remember anyone who was a trustee when you were in school?

How did the Depression or World Wars affect your school life?

How do you think schools have changed since your schooldays?

What books do you remember reading as a child? What was your favorite? Why?

What are your fondest memories of school?

**SAMPLE THANK YOU AND FOLLOW UP**

**OLD SCHOOLHOUSE PROJECT**
**SOUTHSIDE ELEMENTARY**
**376-4425**

Thank you very much for cooperating in our efforts to preserve local history. Your story will be combined with many others to bring alive the past of the early schools in Bartholomew County. Your help is vital to our project.

Interviewer _____
Date _____
Sponsor _____
Phone _____

Below is a list of items you have loaned. These will be duplicated for possible publication. Thank you for sharing with the students articles from your childhood. They will be promptly returned to you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

**Note:** Each interviewee should sign a permission/release form so that items and tapes can be used for publication; a sample permission form is available from the Indiana Historical Bureau, and samples are available in most books on the subject of oral history. Interviewees should be allowed to review written material from or transcripts of their interviews.

**GREAT INTERVIEW!**

Interviewer listens with interest.
Interviewer allows time for the narrator to think.
Interviewer lists on paper unfamiliar terms and takes notes.
Interviewer prepares tape, checks working order of equipment.
Interviewer asks brief questions that require explanations.
Interviewer allows the narrator to finish a story and get back to the topic.
Interviewer asks specific questions that encourage dates, places, and names.
Interviewer makes the narrator comfortable.
Interviewer stays 1 to 1 1/2 hours maximum.
Narrator's voice is heard the most on the tape.
Interviewer uses opportunities to ask questions based on the conversation.
Interviewer shows appreciation for the interview.
Interviewer schedules the interview and shows up on time.

**BE SURE YOUR INTERVIEW IS A SUCCESSFUL ONE FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED!!!**

**WHAT WENT WRONG?**

Interviewer interrupts and appears bored.
Narrator is rushed to remember.
Interviewer calls narrator weeks later for spelling corrections.
Interview discovers tape recorder did not work after interview is finished.
Interviewer asks confusing questions that need yes/no answers.
Interviewer lets the narrrator stay off the subject.
Interviewer tells the narrator, "Tell me everything about your school days."
Interviewer jumps into the best chair and hurries into the interview.
Interviewer stays 20 minutes or 2 to 4 hours.
Interviewer does most of the talking.
Interviewer sticks only to the prepared questions.
Interviewer leaves abruptly when questions are finished.
Interviewer schedules, reschedules, and forgets the appointment.

**BE SURE YOUR INTERVIEW IS A SUCCESSFUL ONE FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED!!!**